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DESIDERIUM—MCMXV-MCMXVIII

— NORMAN DAVEY —

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To Sir John Lucas
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DESIDERIUM
MCMXV-MCMXVIII
NORMAN DAVEY

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MCMXX

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TO
"G.-F."
IN A SPIRIT OF
FILIAL PIETY

Clitellae bovi sunt impositae. Est incredibile quam me negotii taedeat. Non habet satis magnum campum ille tibi non ignotus cursus animi; et industriae meae praeclara opera cessat. Lucem, libros, urbem, domum, vos desidero. Sed feram, ut potero; sit modo annum . . . . Si prorogatur, actum est.

Cicero. Epistola ad Atticum.

DESIDERIUM

AD LECTORES

Albert. MCMXVII.

YOU, who would judge the worth of these my rhymes,
Review their making and regard their times.
Within no quiet study were they planned
By wits embellished and by scholars scanned :
Nor had I critic screed nor idle day
To aid me in the making of my lay.
But here and there some counted minutes' span
Sufficed a word to find, a line to scan ;
And yet, while rhymes were planned and words were
sought
A sudden order broke the chain of thought ;
A little written here, a little there
Broken, ungainly and in bad repair ;
In little more than this my music lies
Remember, and forbear to criticise
These lines too harshly. War's prevailing hand
Has long lain heavy on this patient land :
Let his hard heart and rougher ways excuse
The many misdemeanours of my Muse.

BOOK I.

TO C. W.

Pone sub curru nimium propinqui
solis in terra domibus negata :
dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
        dulce loquentem.

A WORD IN FEALTY

WHEN first I had seen you and claimed you
For worship under the sun,
Wendy and Peter I named you ;
Boy and girl in one :
King of the Cave-men and Tree-folk,
Queen of the fairy clan :
Fresh as the foam where the sea broke :—
Wendy and Peter Pan.

Hair like corn to the sickle :
Eyes like the grey of the hills ;
A smile as sudden and fickle
As bright fish in the rills :
Dreamful and restful and slender ;
Wondrously sweet to scan ;
Dearest in dual gender,
Wendy and Peter Pan.

Bedded in hairbells and heather,
And where the wild thyme grew :
Kissed by the sun and the weather—
Washed by the rain and dew ;
Vestal in holy places,
Built on a kingly plan :
Child of the Gods and the Graces,
Wendy and Peter Pan.

Where the flowering rush and the sedge end,
Beyond the cowslipped meads,
Weaving an antique legend
Of high and knightly deeds;
Dreaming of godlike labours
When first the world began,
And men and gods were near neighbours,
Wendy and Peter Pan.

Tramping the sodden clover,
By all the four winds blown:
Heedless of cliff or cover,
Wet to the very bone;
Braving the watery Pleiad
Where the rain-lashed, rock-ridge ran:
Dryad and Hamadryad—
Wendy and Peter Pan.

Flameless now are your altars:
Lonely now is your shrine
No more in their flower-strung halters
Low deep the sacred kine:
The squirrels that waited your pleasure
Through all the long day's span
Now hoard not for you their treasure;
Wendy and Peter Pan.

The hills and the valleys grieve for you
But at the beech-tree's foot
No longer the shepherds leave for you
The bread and the milk and the fruit;
For you have foresworn and foresaken
The ways of the Gods for man;
And the faith of the humble is shaken,
O Wendy and Peter Pan!

But though in your fields thus ended,
Yet, under alien skies,
A little flame is tended
Which flickers, but never dies;
And though much is scattered and broken,
Such service as a man can
Guard in his heart, I have bespoken
To Wendy and Peter Pan.

THE HOUSE

A GRASSY bluff, sheltered against the hill
From unkind winds ; and southward to the sea
Free to the summer breezes playful will
And target to the sun's bright armoury.

Upon this grassy slope your house was built ;
A fairy lodge within enchanted ground ;
At even by the dying sunlight gilt
And by the stars at midnight silvered round.

A wall of lichened stone : a house of wood :
A pony in a field with daisies starred ;
A twisty path with shells and shingle strewed :
Two wooden gate posts, rotting, stained and scarred.

A terraced lawn where dandelions grew :
A bank with scarlet poppies all a-flame ;
A tousled hedge of tamarisk that threw
Long shadows on the grass when evening came.

The pony who among the daisies stood
Was old, I think, and very, very wise ;
And did no work, but searched your clothes for food
And watched the passing mood in your grey eyes.

And here I think with your most quiet mind
You won much patient service to your wish :
The sea-fowl, hovering on the inshore wind ;
And in the rock-ringed pools, the scaly fish.

Safe in its wattled home, the timorous hare
Quaking at unknown sounds and sudden sway
Of grasses in the still, untroubled air,
Not at your footsteps rose and ran away.

To you did pastured beeves allegiance own
And where the cliff-stream ran through flowery meads
To you Titania bequeathed her throne
And Puck his forest lore and Pan his reeds.

And sometimes you would leave your house at dawn
And through the misty landscape wander on ;
While yet the dewdrops strung with gems your lawn :
While yet the woods in Ruan hid the sun.

Till climbing up to where Polfechan reared
Its granite mass towards the dying stars,
You waited till the round red sun appeared
And bound the outgoing tide with golden bars.

Sometimes on summer nights you stole away
Into the quiet dark, gracious and cool,
And on the cliff-edge, gazing downward, lay
Counting the stars drowned in St. Swithin's Pool.

To fish them out with ladles made from leaves
And sell them to the gnomes you knew by name :—
Lion and Honey Dew and Spindle Sheaves,
Briar and Will o' Wisp and Candle Flame.

Your house, I know, was guarded well by elves,
And little gossip winds that told you tales,
While fairy merchants loaded up your shelves
With magic stuffs in cobweb-corded bales.

Here, in your house, our sorrow found no place ;
For happy are the fields, the skies, the seas :
You saw but laughter in Puck's wizened face
And Pan veiled not your eyes with mysteries.

And now your house is bare and void of you ;
Thither, no longer on a summer's eve
King Oberon returns to visit you,
O Lady of the Land of Make Believe !

Doubtless beyond some far and starry track
You wait Queen Mab on an enchanted main ;
Yet though to your own place you may come back,
I shall not ever see your house again.

AN INVITATION

OH, will you come and play with me
And stay the whole long day ?
There's many things you ought to see
And I've such lots to say.

We'll leave the house at half-past-eight
And walk to Quillan Cave,
And climb the rocks at the Devil's Gate,
And be most awfully brave ;

Crawling along the thin rock ledge
To gaze into the deep,
And wonder, if we missed its edge,
How soon we'd fall asleep.

I have a tale to tell to you
Which only can be told,
To him whose step is firm and true :
To him whose heart is bold.

We'll sit on the tallest rock of all
That floats upon the sea,
And never be afraid to fall
However far it be.

Three apples with me I shall bring
And you and I shall feast
More royally than any king
Or emperor of the East.

Our shoes and stockings we'll leave behind,
And when the tide is low,
We'll climb the sea-weedy rocks to find
A secret cave I know.

By the cave, the ghosts of smugglers sit
And gaze across the sea,
And there's only one way down to it,
Which nobody knows but me.

When we've explored the cave throughout
And climbed again the cliff,
We'll go and have tea with Farmer Prout
Who lives at Teneriffe.

We'll watch the gleam fade from the sea
And our shadows grow fainter and thinner,
And Mother will scold both you and me
Because we're late for dinner.

But we'll sit at the table and not say a word
Nor tell them where we've been,
And of all the wonderful tales we've heard
And all the things we've seen.

A QUARREL

I SHALL not come with you to-day
To climb the cliffs in Kynance Bay:
I wish to have no more to do
With such uncertain folk as you.

What's that you say? You do not know?
It barely was four hours ago,
I passed you in the pony cart.
You have not practised well the art

Of passing old friends by—a grace
That certainly is commonplace—
But one which you should surely learn,
You'll find t'will often serve your turn.

You called on me to stop? You say
I must have been too far away
To hear? You should have sooner known
That you and she were not alone.

Still in her teens: a black-haired chit;
What is it that you see in it?
I met her once; a prig, a scold;
In years too young: in mind too old.

She makes a lot of empty talk;
But can she climb or swim or walk?
Bah! She's afraid of muddy ground:
Of getting wet and being drowned.

You might present some sort of case
If she possessed a pretty face:
Her mouth is large: her hair is thin:
She has no colour in her skin.

Has she bright tresses such as these,
Which (look!) fall freely to my knees?
Has she this cleanly grace of limb?
These slender arms?—these fingers slim?

Could any dream her eyes divine?
Has she rose-petalled lips like mine? . . .
You know that all excuse is vain;
I'll never speak to you again!

What's this? Do you not understand?
Peter! At once, let go my hand:
I will not have it kissed by you—
A silly senseless thing to do.

Oh! Peter, are you not ashamed?
I have a mouth for kisses framed;
And, if you will not let me go,
And pay no heed when I say "No,"

Nor understand your deep disgrace;
Take me and kiss me, face to face;
So that to show our troth is riven
I can return your kisses given.

BINKIE AND PETER AND ME

WE'VE nothing to say to the deaf and the blind
And the people who live in towns;
For the secrets told by the whispering wind
That talks upon the downs
Cannot be told to craven folk,
Ever afraid to be free;
But thus and thus the West Wind spoke
To Binkie and Peter and me.

If you follow the path as far as it goes
Up from St. Vennan's Bay,
Till you come to the place where the wild thyme grows
And the sheep-track dies away;
You come in time to the Wonderful Land
That lies by the Fairy Sea . . .
And thus and thus did we understand,—
Binkie and Peter and me.

In the morning we leave the house and climb
Over the wavy hills,
And meet the wind that waits by the thyme
And do whatever he wills;
For he takes us and shows us most marvellous things
As ever a man may see;
And we've talked with Princes and talked with Kings—
Binkie and Peter and me.

We came to the shore one summer day
And lay upon the sand,
When a boat rode in through the silver spray
And brought a man to land:
He sprawled on the beach and told to us
Stories of Thessaly . . .
And thus we talked with Herodotus,—
Binkie and Peter and me.

And once we met an aged man
Who harboured malice still,
Against a god of the name of Pan
Who lured him to some ill:
He told us his name was Marsyas,
A musical critic; but we
Thought the fellow no end of an ass,—
Binkie and Peter and me.

Once when the friendly skies were dark
And the hills were cloaked in fog,
Suddenly Binkie began to bark;
(Binkie's no fool of a dog!)
But really there was nothing to fear,
Though the man wore pistols three,
And we had lunch with a buccaneer,—
Binkie and Peter and me.

We met an old man once who said
How love and life were vain ;
And Peter got angry and lost his head
And would not talk again ;
But we never guessed until he had gone
And we'd got back to tea,
That we had been rude to Solomon,—
Binkie and Peter and me.

We bring no word for your bazaars :
Your shame, your gain, your toil ;
We are but born of the seas and stars ;
God-children of the soil ;
We have no part in your distress
Nor thought for your degree.
And we make no bargain with Happiness,—
Binkie and Peter and me.

THE FIRE

THERE is a valley God has planned
Beyond the reach of the profane,
Which passes through a guarded land
And ends upon a magic main :
Only the humble and the wise
Discover where this valley lies,
Can enter in and leave again.

Along the valley runs a brook
Whose waters are as crystal still,
As those the antique poet took
Out of the Heliconian hill ;
The grass with patterns daisies print,
And willowherb and watermint,
With their sweet smells the valley fill.

The stream is born upon the moor
Within a mossy, marshy plot ;
But as it nears the western shore
Where grasses cease and flowers are not,
And only yellow lichens grow,
Through chasmed rock the waters flow,
From pool to pool and grot to grot.

To where a little beach is set
At the sea's edge, like a man's hand;
And through the summer the light waves fret
With ripple-marks the silver sand;
Whilst overhead rise high the cliffs
Graven with granite hieroglyphs,
Which only God can understand.

Into this sweet and sacred spot,
Where water-flowers and rushes grew:
Into this guarded, garden plot,
From outer ways, we came, we two,
Into the inner shrine together,
Over the hills of purple heather,
Down to a sea of silver hue.

Once, when the land with fog was veiled
And the tall cliffs like ghosts arose,
And we all day the rocks had scaled
Along the coast where no man goes,
On our way home we reached that strip
Of silver sand, which neither ship
Nor any navigator knows.

Between the moorland and the sea,
Within that rock-reefed, fog-bound bay,
As any lost in Faërie,
Hidden from human sight we lay;
The cliffs but as shifting shadows loomed;
Westward the rhythmic breakers boomed,
Unseen a dozen yards away.

As we lay stretched beside the foam,
I know not by what source inspired,
What water-god or wayward gnome—
Nereid or Naiad rites required . . .
But thus the Elf her dictate made,
And she must always be obeyed,
For she is always most desired.

"O let us search the cliffs for twigs,
And of dry driftwood make a store,
For many gay and gallant brigs
Have perished on this rocky shore;
And this shall be their funeral pyre,
For we shall build a bigger fire
Than we have ever built before.

We laid the twigs in a little heap
With withered leaves and grasses dry,
And baulks of timber round to keep
The heat in lest the flame should die ;
Soon sinuous tongues of red fire curled
And coiled around their little world,
Leaping in fitful flames on high.

We laboured for an hour or more
As hard as any peasant folk,
Searching the rocks along the shore
For baulks and beams of teak and oak ;
And soon so great the fire became
That for ten feet leapt up the flame,
And for ten fathoms rose the smoke.

Until, at last, as we lay, tired,
Watching the smoke in shadow play
The blackened wood with crimson fired
And the white ashes fall away,
A stranger figure slowly came
Out of the fog into the flame,
And close beside the beacon lay.

Throughout my being I felt a thrill.
I know the Elf who gripped my wrist
Thrilled also ; silent and most still
Lay that newcomer from the mist ;
His arms were crossed around his knees :
His eyes shone with strange brilliancies,
Like sardonyx and amethyst.

His unruly curls of russet red
Were cinctured by a verdant band
Of oak-leaves, twined around his head ;
By the fierce sun his skin was tanned :
All his body with a wild grace
Was filled, from the beauty of his face
To the slim fingers of his hand.

He said no word ; he gave no sign ;
Save for the shifting colours bright
That flickered in his eyes divine :
His pose was as profound as night ;
His legs were clothed in silken hair
Dappled with brown and gold ; a pair
Of hoofs shone bright in the fire-light.

The Elf and I with bated breath
Waited and watched. Half-beast, half-man ;
Lover of Life and Lord of Death
And royal antinomian
Moved not ; and as he watched the flame,
We both together found his name
And both together whispered " Pan." . . .

At last with subtle grace he stirred,
And lifting up his tuned reed ;
Without a glance—without a word
The spirit of a god he freed ;
And the wild music rose and fell,
Till all the earth confessed its spell
And all the earth stood still to heed.

And then Pan ceased : once more he bowed
His head, still as a man of stone ;
The smoke from the burning like a cloud
Hung overhead ; the fog had grown
Deeper and darker : all was still
Save the wood-crackling, the gull's shrill
Cry and the sea's deep monotone.

At last Pan spoke in tones as soft
As ever hung upon the air
From the Cathedral organ loft—
So wonderfully sweet they were!
The Elf drew closer; her heart stirred;
She trembled, as one might who heard
The clear voice of a god speak there.

"Long ages past on Hellene soil
The simple peasants called me 'Pan.'
They gave me gifts of corn and oil:
The fealty of the shepherd clan."
He did not look at us, but gazed
Still where the baulks of drift-wood blazed,
But in this manner Pan began.

"I laid a guard on flock and farm;
With flowers were all my altars hung:
I saw nor harm nor fear of harm
My faithful people come among;
And every nymph from wood and brook
Her wonder-haunted cell forsook
To hear the songs that I had sung."

"A pipe of river-reed I wrought
Which Syrinx cut me, and the sound
Of the rare music that I caught
I loosed through all the woods around;
And there beneath the chestnut trees
I piped to the Hamadryades
With chaplet of green oak-leaves crowned."

"But Greece, alas, no more the Greece
I knew beside the Ionian Sea,
Sought newer, stranger gods to please
Than my woodland divinity;
For men now in dark cities dwelt
And no more Elfin magic felt . . .
And the proud Phœban hated me."

"And so I packed my pipes away
And came a traveller to Rome:
But though I piped my sweetest lay,
With those vain folk I found no home.
I made them *Pervigilium*,
But all their hearts were filled with gloom;
Blind to the dawn, the dew, the foam!"

" I journeyed aimless, homeless ; and
At last by devious travel came
To this elf-guarded, sea-girt land,
Which happy people England name :
Where grows the chestnut and the oak
And where are patient pious folk,
Who cherish still the sacred flame."

" And though your shepherds brought no fruit,
Nor flowers nor honey to my shrine ;
Though all the choric dance was mute :
Unslain the kid : unspilled the wine ;
Still through each Dryad-haunted glade
Your poets music-magic made ;
And all the songs they sang were mine."

" There in your woods of birch and beach
The Naiad and the Dryad still
Conspire together, each with each,
To honour me and do my will ;
And Nereids by your circling sea
I found who ministered to me
And Oreads in every hill."

" In England—which is England yet
Despite the sophists whom you con ;
England, who never can forget
The Argive wonder which she won ;
There shall my unseen altars rise
Transcendent to your misty skies ;
By your green fields : 'neath this soft sun."

He turned towards us ; and his glance
Was of a god ; yet, of a child,
Innocent of all arrogance ;
And as he gazed at us he smiled.
Stretching his hands out to the Elf,
He cried :—" O Mistress of Myself :
O Unperturbed and Undefiled ! "

" From your clear purpose be not moved.
O sweeter far and fairer grown
Than any of the nymphs I loved,
Let none usurp your forest throne :
O Daughter of the sky and sea ;
Spirit of English Faërie !
Guard well the kingdom that you own."

Then, even while he spoke, Pan passed
Into the mist, and vanished quite;
The fire we had built was dying fast;
Only the embers still glowed bright. . . .
Silent we rose up from the sand
And went together hand in hand
Over the moors in the dying light.

THE RAIN

I LOVE the sun that tans my cheek
Still to a warmer hue :
I love the foam that boils in the creek
And the heather gemmed with dew ;
I love the sudden, angry squalls
That fleck with white the main—
But most of all and best of all
I love the Cornish rain.

In this dear land of Lyonesse,
Across the purple hill,
The breezes know no bitterness
And the soft rain no chill :
For weather gods are kindly there
And from harsh ways refrain ;
There's virtue in the warm, wet air
And healing in the rain.

People there are who will not dare
To venture out of doors,
If there be thunder in the air
Or rain upon the moors ;
Such laws I do not understand,
As craven folk ordain ;
For there's nothing that the gods command
As winsome as the rain.

I love to wear my oldest dress,
Which leaves my body free,
And hatless, shoeless, stockingless,
Beside the rain-swept sea ;
To wander where the wet rock gleams,
And through the day remain,
As happy as the Prince of Dreams,
Wet through and through with rain.

Maybe in other climes the skies
Are arrogant and hard,
But we in weather ways are wise
And gentle in regard :
Throughout the orbit of the year
We mellowness retain ;
'Tis but the craven-hearted fear
The kindly Cornish rain.

THE SHIP

UPON the western waters—moored to a granite quay—
I have a little ship that waits and dreams
Of the wonder of far waters and adventures met at sea :
Of strange uncharted tides and island gleams.
Sick for travel she is straining at her cables,
Like hound upon a clear scent held in chain,
To enquire into the truth of all the fables
That poets ever made about the main.

Impatient as a lover : undeterred and unresigned ;
Every sheet and stick aboard her groans aloud ;
For the tide-race and the sea-spray and the kisses of the
    wind
And the wide unending world of sea and cloud :
Of all the ships of England she is fleeter
Than any made for love or built for pelf ;
She is holier, she is lovelier, she is sweeter
Than everything on earth except yourself.

Her sails that lean to leeward are whiter than the foam,
Which boils and breaks in spray about her stem ;
She is gracious as a fairy and as wayward as a gnome,
And eager as the waves to follow them :
I shall give the bucking tiller to your holding :
I shall trust the straining sheet in your small hand ;
Whilst all the seas their secrets are unfolding
To you and me who love and understand.

She is weary of this harbour and the shelter of these
shores—
She—the dearest thing on earth that I possess :
O you, who now possess me; she is no more mine, but yours:
(I do not love her more to love you less).
Oh come aboard, dear heart, and be her master,
And I, a foc's'le hand, will pay you court,
For in all the sea I know of no disaster
Like that of idle days still spent in port.

We will hoist her bellying mainsail to the creaking
block's blithe song ;
We will shake her fores'l out to catch the wind :
We will sweep across the tide-race where the seas run
swift and strong,
And leave the rock-ringed harbour far behind ;
O we'll beat across the bay with song and laughter :
We'll let the sheet run out to sounds of mirth,
And sail away where none may follow after ;—
Where enchanted islands gleam behind the earth.

O loveliest Elf in Elfland—O you I loved of old,
If you'll sail her out beyond the world's red marge,
I'll make her sails of purple and a poop of beaten gold,
Till Cleopatra envies you your barge :—
Her starboard light an emerald out of Asia :
Her port light shall a giant ruby be ;
And her decks shall be of rosewood and acacia,
If only you will sail away with me !

THE SEA

O LET us leave the trodden earth—
Forest and fen and field ;
Their treasure-chambers hold no worth
Such as the sea can yield ;
By tor and tarn ; by pool and pine,
Man's trail and temple wait ;
But the secrets that the seas enshrine
Are still inviolate.

Come, let us find that secret beach
Which we alone have scanned,
Where grey cliffs whisper each to each
Daylong across the sand ;
Where caves ensepulchre Romance,
And in the still rock pools
Are visions to discountenance
The wisdom of the schools.

The skies are clear : no breezes stir
The still cerulean lake :
The very ripples hardly hear
The music that they make :
Oh, let us cleave the crystal main,
And with the white foam shod,
Do fealty like a faithful thane
Unto the water-god.

Beneath the sea are citadels,
Fairer than the earth can show,
All built of coral, pearls and shells,
With magic gleams aglow;
There, there are gardens, filled with flowers,
Which you may walk within,
And adamantine treasure-towers
All guarded by the Djinn.

To lie upon the heaving wave
Beneath the sapphire dome,
Gazing into the architrave
Woven with golden foam—
To float out with an ebbing tide
On to a crimson sea;
Can the hosts of Paradise provide
Such a felicity?

When we have read the deep-sea rune
And once more swim to land,
We'll revel in the blazing noon
Upon the sun-hot sand:
We'll smell the sweet sea-weedy smells,
Careless and fair and free;
And raise an altar made of shells
To God who made the sea.

A WORD IN FAREWELL

DEAR love, you are too gracious to deplore
The echo of a song which once was sad;
For you, upon your far and sunlit shore,
The memory of this should make you glad;
To know that though with winter petals fall
One petal to my rose remains through all.

Think not to pity me, who am most proud
That thus with no hot passion to possess
Or hope to whisper to the heart aloud,
I yet can conjure up this happiness,
And though imprisoned can unfettered roam
By your dream sea—beside your fairy foam.

That, at this time, when hope in life is over,
And only primal fears of death remain,
I cherish still the rapture of a lover
And some small measure of that grace retain,
Which I had won from you, who had so much
As never to have felt the loss of such.

For then you were, as now you must be still,
Respondent to the questioning flames of night,
Kin to the vagrant winds that leave the hill
The peasants in the valleys to affright:
The sun at noon, the moon, the stars, the sea,
Were subalterns in your majority.

And there in that well-loved and guarded isle,
Through the long summer days beside the sea,
You sought with gentle logic to beguile
Me from the path of my iniquity;
And, most humane, some remedy to find
Against self-love and vanity of mind.

I knew not, then, how I was altogether
As insubstantial as a shadow flung
Over the fields of wheat in windy weather.
I thought I was too old and not too young:
I dreamed that I was wise and never guessed
The wisdom of the gods, which you possessed.

Within the cloistered quiet of your caves,
So guarded that no whisper ever came
Of the world's frenzy: by your speaking waves
Encrimsoned with the sunset's dying flames—
Then surely was the time and there the place
In which to disremember my disgrace.

With a preceptor so sublimely read
In all the lore of moor and sea and sky,
What scholar is there who would not be led
Into the ways that he should travel by ?
In that academy so vastly planned
Who could be still too blind to understand ?

Yet I was blind to sight and deaf to sound,
Though of all forest notes your voice was sweeter
Than ever poet in Parnassus found
And strung upon the golden frame of metre ;
I yet remained disdainful of your spell—
Inept, incurious, and infidel.

You showed me how much greater than the whole
Of the round world, loomed large that little part
Of sacred earth you loved : that the far goal
Of life's ambition vanished at the start ;
Or won, or lost ; for ever gleaming dim
Upon the dying world's receding rim.

You tried to win me from the ways of earth,
And offered me what then I could not prize,
Who mortal, knew not the immortal worth
Of the great tenderness in your grave eyes ;
You saw my fault and yet forebore to grieve—
Too much in love with truth to make-believe.

Your silken hair that fell below your knees
Was finer yet than spider ever spun
Of gossamer, and sweet with harmonies,
Like the gold clouds that cap the sinking sun :
And the untutored wisdom of your grace
Chanted aloud the wonder songs of Thrace.

The sun-god amorous had kissed your skin
To the warm tint of frailest porcelain
Against the sunlight shown. You might have been
A daughter of the sunshine and the rain,
Hardly conceived of gross and mortal folk—
Nymph of a stream or dryad of an oak.

And yet you stooped to please a mortal lover ;
One who in earthy ways was foolish-wise ;
Leaving the elves lonely among the clover
To venture in so poor an enterprise . . .
I learned, dear heart, but only learnt too late,
How far I fell—and from what high estate.

And then one golden day in autumn time
I left the land where you were sovereign,
Nor understood how grievous was my crime :
Remorse brought no despair : regret no pain. . . .
Most wistfully, I think, you watched me go
Till lost from sight where the road bends below.

* * * * *

Your happiness, dear love, is medicine
To calm th' unquiet mind ; and I know now
You grieve no more for any fault of mine.
To-day by stilly pond and forest bough,
Or where the grey waves coil, curve upon curve,
I serve to learn, that I may learn to serve.

Dear heart, you should be glad to hear of this :
The tiny seed you planted grows apace ;
The magic of my metamorphosis
Humbles my pride yet gives me heart of grace—
And, sometimes, at rare moments, I can hear
The very pipes of Pan sound sweet and clear.

" Hail and Farewell ! " dear love, " Hail and Farewell ! "
I cannot speak with you, but in my dreams
I walk with you in fields of asphodel,
Through haunted meads, by Naiad-guarded streams ;
And he who thus can dream in this world's plan
Is blest above the common lot of man.

BOOK II.

TO J. S. Y.

. . . . . Mæcenas, mearum
grande decus columenque rerum.

THE RECORD OF AN ITINERARY, UNDERTAKEN BY CAPRICE FROM MONTEPULCIANO INTO UMBRIA: OF SUNDOWN IN TUSCANY: OF DANCING: OF HOW UMBRAGE MAY BE TAKEN WITH AN OLD FRIEND: OF HOW TO TRAVEL BY ROAD; AND OF THE CROSSING OF A LAKE; OF HOW LUIGI CAME WITH US: OF A TEMPEST: AND OF THE ENDING OF A JOYOUS DAY.

EVEN the most ambitious orchestrations
Are best begun, I think, in minor keys;
Through little crooked paths and slow gradations
So to achieve Olympian harmonies:
Even the mighty winds that range the seas
In water-spouts, typhoons and hurricanes
Begin by chasing leaves down window-panes.

And this, which is no epic monument
To the heroic dead; nor yet a lay
To lighten any lover's discontent:
Which borrows no sun-glory from the day:
That has no calm and certain words to say,
Such as God gathers in from sea and moor
And whispers in the doorways of the poor—

This which is but a very worthless song
In memory of idle, careless days,
When Youth pursued his pageant course along
Most eager to enquire and swift to praise;
Finding light and delight in many ways:
Such fare as this should surely make its grace
In the quintessence of the commonplace.

So the first memory to be exhumed,
To common talk shall be indigenous :—
An acrid smell of petrol, half-consumed,
Which issued from a motor-omnibus,
That growled and groaned and duly carried us
Through rolling clouds of dust that barely showed
The olive trees which sentinelled the road.

The car was full, some dozen peasant folk :
Women in coloured shawls and men in breeches ;
A factor with a most prodigious cloak ;
Two aged hags that looked (but were not) witches :
A priest whose cassock gaped through lack of stitches :
A student with a bag and mandolin
And two Dominicans—one fat, one thin.

The car rocked on the road, snorted and clattered ;
The factor lit a long cigar and wheezed :
The peasant women laughed and chaffed and chattered,
The priest counted his beads, took snuff and sneezed :—
The thin Dominican appeared displeased
At being by the student's bag encumbered ;
The fat one in the further corner slumbered.

Through olive groves, past cypress guarded shrines,
Ever the hot, white, dusty road ran steeper ;
By yellow bluffs all overgrown with vines ;
By ruined churches hung with scarlet creeper.
The little gullies in the hills grew deeper ;
And ever farther off the valley lay
Veiled in the heat-haze of an August day.

And so we made our slow uncertain course
In the precarious vehicle that bore us,
Tracking the white road to its mountain source,
Until the city walls rose up before us :
And dogs and beggars came and whined in chorus
As through a coil of curses, dust and din,
The gates clanged open and we lumbered in.

A little, crooked old-world Tuscan town
In the Italian sunshine all a-glow,
Built on a rocky hill-top, bare and brown,
Save where the gold and scarlet lichens grow :
With olive orchards on the slopes below ;
And red-tiled palaces and spires and towers,
And an old Roman wall o'ergrown with flowers.

Thus Montepulciano waits and dreams
Perhaps of civic glory hers no longer ;
In fitful waking thoughts and sunset gleams
Of days when Papal Bulls were somewhat stronger :
Or maybe of some local ballad-monger,
Who journeyed far and even brought to Rome
Some songful tribute from his Tuscan home.

To Montepulciano, Jack and I,
So journeyed in a wilful, wayward mood :
To Montepulciano, throned i' the sky,
And praised all that we saw as wise folk should ;
And found the wine superlatively good :
Oh, Jack ! How long will cruel Fate restrain
Us two from wandering the world again ?

To Montepulciano thus we came ;
And all its cobbled squares were warm with light :
Its topmost spires were tipped with golden flame,
And twisted, gargoyled gutter-spouts gleamed bright,
And Trasimeno shone like malachite,
Shifting from green to silver, gold to grey,
Down in the plain a score of miles away.

A square, four-storied, broad-eaved, whitewashed inn,
Pervaded by a savoury smell of cooking :
With narrow latticed shutters painted green
And massive staples in the wall for hooking
Your horses to ; and windows overlooking
A hundred miles of olive, corn and vine,
Gleaming and shimmering in the hot sunshine.

A sober, self-respecting old-world house,
Unknown to harsh intent and stranger ways :
Grave as a sexton—silent as a mouse,
Save upon Christian feasts and market days,
When hucksters cry their wares and vinters raise
A most gigantic thirst in beating down
The country growers who have come to town.

To such an inn as this we made our way,
And found, at the top of the house, a stone-floored
chamber,
And threw the shutters open to the day
Till sunshine turned the red-stone floor to amber :
Then left our packs and sallied forth to clamber
Along the ramparts and to watch the sun
Paint half of Tuscany vermilion.

There runs a crooked stair of weathered stone
Behind Vignola's palace in the square,
With yellow moss and grasses overgrown,
Up to a giddy, wind-blown bastion, where
A brick basilica looms gaunt and bare
Above the vines a hundred fathoms high
Against the rose and saffron of the sky.

Here tolled no vesper bell : no sound of psalms
Echoed within the nave : beside the door
A pock-marked beggar sat and whined for alms ;
No white-robed choir paced the mosaic floor :
Only the ceaseless prayers of the poor
Rose through the gloom to plead for a small part
Of the unbounded pity in God's heart.

Upon the old Etruscan wall we sat
By that tall Church scarred with sun-heat and blizzard ;
And dropped some *soldi* in the beggar's hat
And teased with a long grass a grey-green lizard :
Watching the sun, that incomparable wizard,
Distil red blood from water, gold from bricks ;
And conjure other pleasant parlour tricks.

How many happy lovers may have come
To this high place hung in the azure skies,
By the sweet mastery of Love held dumb,
Gazing into each other's sunlit eyes
With steadfast look: if only to surprise
Out of its jealous haunt their image fair,
Reflected in that agile mirror there.

Here Andrea and Adrian may have met,
And seated on this wall, have planned together,
A hundred graceless, pleasant things, they yet
Meant to adventure through the summer weather:
And talked of Life and Love, and argued whether
Friendship was deeper e'en than Love, or no;
With commentary culled from Cicero.

And here we two, from a mist-shrouded isle,
Ringed by the cold foam of the Northern sea,
Came to this sunlit, mountain-town to wile
Away the summer days in errantry;
To wander as the Western wind is free
And from all fetters to obtain release
Save the light bondage of our own caprice.

We two, who had been boys at the same school—
Stood sponsor for each other's worst offences :
Put all our pocket-money in one pool :
Made the same howlers in τίθημι's tenses :
Had been the best of friends in best of senses,
And held as we pursued each fleet-foot minute
That Jonathan and David were not in it.

Alike we had wandered in forbidden ways
And suffered some rude thwackings for our trouble ;
Alike in vain endeavour fixed our gaze
Upon Ambition's gaily-coloured bubble :
And tramped together through the yellow stubble,
Watching the covey raised in whirring chorus
With the red setter lollopping before us.

We sat and watched the sun incarnadine,
The Western plain in the round world's gyration,
And quoted old Khayyam in praise of wine ;
And found it a most pleasant occupation
To sit in sunshine, wrapt in contemplation
Of old Chianti, which to every sinner,
Is the fit adjunct to a Tuscan dinner.

And then and there, remembering my Flaccus,
I made a hurried rhyme to recommend
The joys of an untutored, rustic Bacchus;
Calling it—"*Invitation to a Friend*
To taste a homely vintage, and to spend
A few hours in the very pleasant task
Of emptying a big, round-bellied Flask."

A LATIN ODE DONE INTO ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA JUST BEFORE SUNDOWN.

"Come drink with me cheap wine—common Chianti;
Made from the grapes my little vineyard grew:
A raw, rough wine—such wine as did for Dante—
'Twill do for you!

"For it began its course of fermentation
From the sweet juice of grapes, the day the *Times*
With half a leader's length of adulation
Printed your rhymes.

"To you, strange ships, rich laden with a cargo
Of Mumm or Cliquot may lead laughter in;
With me, nor Heidseck, Roederer nor Margot,
Graces my bin."

If you would see an empty Tuscan square
Wake suddenly to an unwonted bustle,
Announce you want a *vettura*, and be there
In an hour's time to see the Homeric tustle :
The wealth of language and display of muscle
By rural *vetturini* who aspire
To drive the *Illustrissimo* for hire.

Oh ! would I had the brush of Rabelais,
With which to paint the scene :—the whitewashed inn,
Flushed with the red-gold of the dying day ;
Without, a shifting, motley crowd—within,
A dozen drinkers, raising ceaseless din
And calling through the windows opened wide
To friends and rivals in the crowd outside

As we climbed down the crooked stairs and entered
The sunlit square, the tumult grew apace,
Seething and shifting till at last it centred
Upon a large man with a round, red face,
Who with gesticulation and grimace,
Loosed in a voice immoderately loud
A torrent of abuse upon the crowd.

He wore a shabby, loose snuff-coloured coat,
A parti-coloured shirt of red and yellow :
A spotted handkerchief around his throat
Beneath a double chin and nose as mellow
As stilton cheese : a Falstaff of a fellow ;
An honest man and knave together blent—
Corpulent, bibulous, grandiloquent.

He stood before us, and with hat in hand
He swept the dust that lay upon the street,
His smile was eloquent, expansive, bland ;
His hat's brim traced elipses round his feet :
His speech was with superlatives replete ;
He boasted of unthinkable resources :
A dozen carriages : a score of horses.

He told us of his chestnuts, bays and roans,
His sorrels, piebalds and flea-bitten greys :
He turned and spat upon the cobble-stones
In speaking of his rival's knavish ways ;
He handed us his card (his face ablaze
As he had been a poet with a sonnet),
With *Bastinelli, Luigi,* printed on it.

But as with glowing metaphors he wove
The coloured web of rhetoric around us,
A lithe, dark fellow, like a missile, drove
Clean through the circle that had formed around us :
Thanking aloud the saints that he had found us,
And swearing that, throughout the country-side,
His horses were the best—that Luigi lied.

Did Luigi lose his consequential air ?
Was his Falstaffian worth and wit dumbfounded
By the wild ravings of his rival there
Who in our midst so suddenly had bounded ?
He was not by such common vaunt astounded,
But, lifting him in both hands up on high,
He launched him like an arrow in the sky.

He fell I know not where—of that no matter ;
We made our pact with Luigi there and then.
The crowd outside the inn began to scatter ;
The noise and tumult faded from our ken ;
Whilst Luigi, superman of supermen,
Within the inn with us—Immune, Immense,
Drank, in red wine, our health—at our expense.

I am no man of action—but with Jack
Equus denotes a major constellation :
He is a horseman : I admit a lack
In the most subtle art of equitation :
But I can hold no brief for his translation,
When asking Luigi for a strawberry roan
In Tuscan more peculiarly his own.

What is more pleasant than to dip one's chin
In *bicchieri* deep, and talk of horses
And of the ways of roads, in some old inn
In which *spaghetti* forms most of the courses ?
To plumb the cellar's most remote resources,
And to conclude your bargain for a gig
With *vino santo* and the purple fig ?

When one has made provision for the morrow
And further travel, and an empty flask
Upon the table's edge dissembleth Sorrow,
Taking the dourest pessimist to task,
Youth surely will most prayerfully ask
Fate, the hard-hearted, to forego her part
And let the face of Beauty stir his heart.

I know not if we prayed—I know that Fate,
Th' ironic mistress of the world, was kind;
And leaving empty glass and empty place
And Luigi, filled with pride and wine behind,
We climbed the old inn's crooked stairs to find
In the with-drawing room that topped the stairs
Some other travellers assembled there.

There was the factor, who had doffed his cloak
And donned a broadcloth suiting the occasion:
His wife, who somewhat hurriedly awoke
From armchair sleep broken by our invasion:
A woman, largely built; of bourgeois station,
With temper sometimes difficult to handle
And a great gift for piety and scandal.

The student, swaying with his mandolin
To the alluring music of the dance
He wrung from his five strings: a young man in
A velvet jacket he had brought from France;
The fat Dominican, deep in a trance,
With head that nodded to the rhythmic sense
And two hands clasped around his corpulence—

A little fair-haired woman with grey eyes
And restless hands, who sat beside the student :
Who turned a hostile front to enterprise
And said she didn't dance (perhaps she wouldn't) :
Perhaps she thought the dancing was imprudent :—
(I do not think the factor felt uneasy
Seeing his daughter dance with the *Inglesi*.)

His daughter ! Cradled in the amorous South,
A stranger yet to mortal man's caresses ;
Two star-like eyes—an unkissed, kissing mouth,
An oval, olive face, framed in dark tresses :
A quiet smile as calm as a princess's ;
And slender hands with fingers long and slim
As those of Ghirlandajo's seraphim.

Jack, at the shrine of beauty made his bow ;
(And I in patient emulation mine)
He won the factor's heart—he soothed his *Frau*,
Charmed the duenna—joked with the divine ;
Contrived with easy grace to intertwine
His footsteps, langourous in their mazy motion,
With Aphrodite, risen from the ocean.

The dancers traced their labyrinthine track,
The mandolinist twanged a livelier measure;
I stood against the wall and glared at Jack,
Nursing within my heart a high displeasure,
That he, thief-like, should snatch away this treasure,
Taking advantage of untoward chance,
Simply since I could not, and he could, dance.

I did not muse in philosophic guise,
Nor argue how when died another day,
This child of earth, which now so pleased my eyes
Would be so many, many leagues away.
That even if her memory should stay
Through a new day's long length, 'twould ill survive
The myriad memories of four or five.

I did not argue sagely :—" What was he
To Hecuba—or Hecuba to him? "
I stood a prey to green-eyed jealousy;
A man whose heart was hard and smile was grim,
And cursed a youth that had been far too prim
To countenance the frolic of the masses
And learn to dance in time at dancing-classes.

I stood apart, a jaundiced, jealous lover :
(I would have killed you, Jack, if thoughts could kill)
I did not wait to see the dancing over,
Nor linger to remark your grace and skill :
Outside the night was wonderfully still ;
I found the crooked stairs and clambered down
Into the white streets of the silent town.

Gargoyle and gable cast in shadow-play
A tumult of grotesques before my feet ;
Across the road from where the shadows lay,
One read the very numbers in the street,
So brightly shone the moon, as if to cheat
Night of her right to succour cut-throat folk
And cover their dark deeds with her black cloak.

I crossed the square, flooded in light, and came,
By the stone stairs, to where, a few hours past,
We two had stood and watched the dying flame
Of sunset fire the olive trees, and cast
Its mantle round the world, until the last
And tallest hills burned beacon-wise and bright
Which now loomed like grey ghosts in the white night.

What cared I that the earth was silvered over,
Like those bright balls that fortune-tellers use—
That I had all the world to be my lover
And all the fires in Heaven to light my Muse ;
Such little things the minds of men abuse,
That one may fall past hope of all repentance
For a swift glance—a laugh—an idle sentence.

And all around me, wrapped in virgin white,
The world lay, like a flower within my hand,
To pluck did I so choose ; but evil spite
Made pleasant thoughts to my mind contraband :
And left a heart too hard to understand :
The soft moon magic and no eyes to see
The wingèd skirmishes of Faërie.

I wandered homewards, sick of heart and lonely,
Outcast of earth beneath and heaven above,
Who, by mean jealousy of mind, had only
Deposed a friend and not enthronèd Love ;
Such puff-ball boasts as this man's vows may prove ;
As changeful as a ripple and as deep ;
Brief as a shadow and as frail as sleep.

* * * * * * *

I woke, and gazed in rapturous amazement ;
For all my room was flooded with gold flame,
And borne upon the breeze, through the open casement,
The wild-flower scents from mountain pastures came ;
And I forgot the night and all my shame,
Broke out in laughter like a child at play
And cried to Jack to greet the waking day.

We breakfasted off eggs and wine and honey,
And then went out into the little square,
Empty of folk to-day, silent and sunny,
To find our faithful Luigi waiting there.
But where—by all the saints in heaven—oh ! where ;
Where was the strawberry roan without reproach ?
The hand-sewn harness ? The emblazoned coach ?

A horse of craven soul and meagre body :
A knock-kneed chestnut with an evil eye ;
I never saw a carriage half so shoddy
As that which Jack and I were standing by :
A dissolute, dilapidated fly,
Scarred by the use of years—warped by the weather,
With help of wire and whipcord held together.

We clambered in—the barouche lurched like a ship
In tide-race held when half-a-gale is blowing ;
Luigi shook out his reins and cracked his whip
And chirrupped to his beast to get it going ;
But when we would have started there's no knowing
Had not an urchin with a piece of plank
Laid a resounding smack upon its flank.

We clattered out beneath the city gate
On to the road, white in the summer glare ;
Two travellers at the caprice of Fate
Going—we knew not why and cared not where.
The hum of bees was drowsy in the air :
Behind us rose the road, dusty and steep,
And all the world in sunshine seemed asleep.

Slowly we made our way down to the plain ;
The sun climbed high into the shimmering blue :
Man's lordliest ambition seemed but vain :
Life's best rewards indubitably few,
As we, with half-closed eyes surveyed the view,
Somewhat shut out by Luigi perched across us,
Astride our narrow world like a Colossus.

A clump of cypresses—a ruined shrine,
A peasant woman in a yellow shawl :
A vintner's cart hauling a vat of wine :
A splash of scarlet poppies in a wall :—
Faces and fields and houses, one and all,
Crept up and greeted us and passed behind
Like thistle-down upon the summer wind.

The sky was cloudless—hotter grew the sun ;
No errant zephyr stirred the ripening wheat ;
From cracks and crannied stones crept one by one
The little lizards, basking in the heat ;
Whilst Jack and I leant back upon our seat
And meditated in a dreamful bliss,
And my rhymed meditation ran like this.

"There runs a road in Tuscany;
As far as any man can see,
The road runs on and on and on
From Everywhere to Erewhon.
A broad, white road, in noon-day heat,
And all the travellers you meet
Have ceased to journey and have stayed
Upon the road which God has made
And fallen asleep. In many cases
The very horses in their traces
Stand with dropped heads, and doubtless dream
Of green grass growing by the stream
That circles in a silver band
Throughout the Happy Meadow Land.
And human folk who for their part
Have fallen asleep in crib or cart,
Dream also—ever varied dreams,
Of wizard lights and fairy gleams:
Of gardens, cool with crystal springs,
Where waterflies with rainbow wings
Hover above the lily leaves;

And here nor dust nor sun-heat grieves,
For through the grasses strung with stars
Tall girls with alabaster jars
Bear spicéd drinks, as sweet and cool
As e'er were quaffed in old Stamboul.
Fantastic ferns with feathery fronds
Rise high above the lily ponds,
Where, to and fro, beneath the shade,
Clad in white silks with silver braid,
The children of the stars devise
Adventures rich with high emprise
Upon the wings of dragonflies :—
To fly along the Golden River,
That through the Worlds goes on for ever,
Until the River's source is found,
A baffling spring in sandy ground ;
And for unnumbered leagues around
The stream, there's nothing in the land
Save golden water, silver sand.
And when the children reach the source,
Each leaps from off his wingéd horse,
Dips in his jar of woven gold
And fills it full as it will hold
Of that bright water at the spring :

Then on the dragonflies they wing
Their way beneath the unshadowed dome,
And laugh and race each other home.
When they have reached again their place,
Where starry gardens interlace,
And painted fruits and gold flowers are,
They climb the wall that girds their star,
And leaning over downwards gaze
Where gleams the earth like chrysoprase
In sunlight spinning ; and they throw
The golden waters all aglow
Upon the earth ; and where they fall
Sleep overtakes and dreams enthral
All human people, wheresoe'er,
At sea, on shore, in field or fair
They wander. Such an one as these,
A seeker after mysteries :
A scholar of the Sacred Code,
I fell asleep on God's White Road."

So slept both Jack and I, and slept as sound
As bedded upon down and bowered with roses :
Oblivious of whither we were bound
And schemes which men propose and God disposes ;
Of flies that came and settled on our noses,
And Luigi, who with reins slack on the shaft,
Had likewise drunk of the Lethean draught.

Past olive orchards, rich with silver fruit :
Past corn and vineyard set in chequered plan,
We rumbled slowly on ; unseeing, mute ;
A somnolent and silent caravan :
A sight to cause surprise to any man ;
Two travellers asleep—the driver dozing,
And horse and cart left to their own disposing.

At length, the chestnut, feeling on his bit,
Nor jerk nor twist to make him mend his ways,
Began to use what little mother wit
Nature had given him, and pulled the chaise
Into the road-side grass, that he might graze—
Luigi awoke, cracked loud his whip, and swore,
And we proceeded on our way once more.

And partly that he might remain awake—
Partly, I think, because the subject pleased him,
Without much thought what form his verse would take,
A species of poetic virus seized him ;
No doubt the tricks of metre somewhat teased him ;
But it is not too difficult to please
In unscanned verse in unrhymed Tuscanese.

LUIGI'S SONG RHYMED INTO ENGLISH

Most men are fools :
All Englishmen are fools ;
As though they had no country of their own,
They leave the land where doubtless they are known,
To wander without cause or argument
By foreign ways in haste and discontent. . . .
All Englishmen are fools !

Some men are rich ;
All Englishmen are rich ;
A man, by nature, asks more than his price ;
The English ask him once but never twice :
They buy a lot of trash at thrice its worth ;
If God would sell it, they would buy the earth. . . .
All Englishmen are rich !

Most men are blind :
All Englishmen are blind ;
They cannot see the simplest peasant's plot
(One often wonders : " Have they eyes or not ? ")
They see not what is truth and what are lies,
Nor anything six inches from their eyes. . . .
All Englishmen are blind.

Most men are mad :
All Englishmen are mad ;
Or else they would not leave their leisured ease ;
Honour, repute, rewards, monopolies,
And all the worth and wealth that they possess,
To tramp the world in childish restlessness. . . .
All Englishmen are mad !

Most men are heathen :
All Englishmen are heathen ;
They burn no candles for the suffering dead :
God's Sacred Wafer is to them but bread ;
Their mouths are full of sin ; their hearts of slaughter ;
They never cross themselves with Holy Water. . . .
All Englishmen are heathen.

But though all Englishmen are heathen, mad,
Fools, rich and blind,
I pray to the Saints in heaven that they send
More of their kind ;
That they are fools—they harm not others so ;
That they are mad—the good God made them so ;
That they are heathen—still they cannot see :
That they are rich—'tis well their riches be
Spent in the pleasant land of Italy ;
That Christians should be lightened of the yoke
Of poverty by foolish, heathen folk.

And so in easy stages through the heat
We came to Castiglione, burnt and brown,
And clattered in upon the cobbled street
To find the only hostel in the town
Where we could eat and drink, a tumbled-down
And gloomy *osteria* with mud floor
And bunch of greenery outside the door.

Luigi we paid his very moderate wage,
And to the Innkeeper, an unwashed bandit,
Announced that we desired to engage
A boat, and such intrepid souls as manned it,
With which to cross the lake (thus had we planned it)
To Passignano—and from there by train
To make Perugia and the Umbrian plain.

'Twas market day : the street was filled with booths
And women marketing in pinned up skirts ;
Around us pressed a score of long-limbed youths
With greasy caps and still more greasy shirts :
A squalid crowd, who, had they their deserts,
Would, without pause for plea or grace of bail
Have seen the inside of the common jail.

Before us, fingering a tattered cap,
Stood a gaunt figure with a towsled beard :
One finger he had lost through some mishap.
His hair grew long and close—his eyes were bleared ;
Whilst through a stained and ragged shirt appeared
Virgin and Child, displayed to common view,
Tattooed upon his chest in red and blue.

Pietro Arimini was his name—
A fisherman, and wise in navigation ;
He had a boat and men to man the same ;
He'd take us to whatever destination
We chose to name ; a small remuneration
Paid on the spot would not be found amiss
In nailing fellows for a job like this.

Three *liri* we gave him—foolish thing to do !
And having lunched off cheese and such rude fare ;
Some rough, red wine : a lean cigar or two ;
We found our packs and walked into the square,
Finding Pietro Arimini there,
Exuberant, inebriate, elate,
With four stout rascals in like jovial state.

Pietro led the way ; we followed on
Through Castiglione's tortuous streets that wound
Down to the lake : still hotter the sun shone,
A-glare from whitewashed houses, dusty ground.
The old town walls were passed—a path was found
Of sun-baked mud down to the water's edge,
Winding within the labyrinth of sedge.

A path but two feet wide. In single file,
We walked through marshes of the kind that breeds
Bull-frogs and water-flies, maybe a mile,
Until a narrow creek parted the reeds,
Where lay an aged punt, o'ergrown with weeds,
Half-filled with water—rotting, warped and black ;
And by it Luigi, standing with a sack.

(I have not learnt to-day why Luigi came,
Or what was in the sack which Luigi carried ;
One sack may hide a heavy weight of shame :
A body of a child that had miscarried ?
Was Luigi murderer ? Was Luigi married ?
Was Luigi pedlar, smuggler, necromancer ?
All questions to be asked, and not one answer !).

Two fellows seized the boat and pushed together,
Slipping her painter from a neighbouring stump :
One took his hat, worn stiff with grease and weather,
And bailed her out : she knew nor bilge nor pump.
Another reached her with a flying jump
As she swung out, and flirted her around
To where we stood upon the oozy ground.

We all of us climbed in, and one tall fellow
Poled with an oar to get the boat away,
But leaning out, and being over-mellow
With wine, began unsteadily to sway,
Until the boat, slipping from off the clay,
Left him his mud-stuck pole to follow after,
Splash in the water midst a roar of laughter.

We pulled him in ; the rowers hung on the oars,
Sweeping the boat along in rhythmic motion,
Out from the shelter of the reedy shores
Over the waters of the inland ocean !
A crew committed to the Bacchic potion :
A list to port : a demi-john aboard :
A master mariner, drunk as a lord !

And thus and thus upon the lake we lay.
Above us burned the sky, a brazen dome :
No ripple stirred the stillness of the bay,
Save when our boat's prow broke the flood to foam
A smother of white cloud rose in a comb
Over the Western hills : one's eyelids ached :
The paint upon the thwarts swelled up and flaked

Light, white cloud skirmishers climbed one by one
Over the sapphire vault in feathery wreath,
And drew a veil across the fiery sun,
Throwing swift shadows on the earth beneath :
A little wind came up : a fitful breath ;
In sudden eddies breaking here and there
That scarcely stirred the lake or cooled the air.

(How runs the thread of Life ? And what is man ?
A paper boat upon an ebbing tide
That lays no course for port : that knows no plan
Save only for a little time to glide
Upon the mirrored water, and abide
Whatever Fate may bring, save of her grace
She leave him not for ever in one place.)

And so upon a lake around whose rim
Carthage once dealt to the Immortal City
Bitter defeat, we ventured life and limb
In boating escapades with drunk banditti,
Who, knowing greed of gain and little pity,
Had Luigi not been there to censure slaughter
Had surely stripped and popped us in the water.

(Oh Luigi, Luigi, Luigi Bastinelli,
May pilgrims ever wait before your doors :
From dawn to dusk—from sundown to *reveillé*,
Be your *vetturi* theirs : their money yours ;
To such high parts as your ambition soars
May you yet win ; and when old age be met
May you know no remorse and small regret.)

A pyramid of cloud rose in the blue
And overtopped the world and broke asunder,
Letting one ray of sunlight filter through
To cap a vine-clad hill with golden wonder :
A puff of wind : a little growl of thunder :
A heavy drop or two ; a ghostly flash,
Followed close after by an echoing crash,

Told us the storm had found us: the wind rose,
And ripples grew to waves with white-foam crested,
And rain storms hid the land. I thought of those
Who likewise once upon a lake had breasted
The angry wave. The thought with grace invested
Pietro there; for whom one might mistake
Another Peter on another lake.

The rowers rested on their oars and sung
Snatches from Tosca, whilst the galley lay
Rolling and plunging aimlessly among
The smother of white foam that hid the bay;
A sudden wind-squall covered us in spray—
Pietro laughed and cursed and drank his grog
To Luigi, in the bows, sick as a dog.

The storm passed over us; the errant sun
Once more shone down upon us, lion-hearted,
And shadow phantasies slipt one by one
From off the hills and silently departed;
And three hours from the time when we had started
Out from the reedy marsh and put to sea
We lay by Passignano's granite quay.

Above the little quay some dozen paces
A small *albergo* offers drink and food
And half-a-hundred odd and quiet graces
As so demure and grave a hostel should :—
A low verandah, built of glass and wood,
Conducive to long draughts and noon-day dozes,
All smothered in a bank of crimson roses.

And here, where bees came in and red flowers grew—
Within this cool and sweetly-scented arbour,
We broke a flask of wine and paid our crew,
And later watched them leave the little harbour :
Pietro, that despair of any barber,
His red hair flaming in the evening light,
Declaiming from the stern, till lost to sight.

I know not if they ever reached again
The Tuscan shore : another storm arose,
And hid the galley in a whirl of rain ;
They may have weathered through—or sunk—who
knows ?
They may have made the Archipelagoes,
Upon whose happy isles the Heroes dwell
For ever among fields of asphodel.

Whilst in the West, like some great cardinal,
Kneeling before the shrine where rests the Host,
Flamed, crimson-robed, the dead sun's funeral.
And in the inn on Trasimeno's coast
We listened to the storm, and made the most
Of a *frittata*, very brown and savoury,
And watched the lightning with conspicuous bravery.

And, later, stood upon the rain-washed platform
With bagmen, peasants, priests and fisher folk;
Jostled by many a thin and many a fat form
Under umbrella, cassock, coat or cloak;
Once more a tiny part of God's Great Joke,
Which He, on the world's stage has caused to be
Acted. A Joke that only He can see!

BOOK III.

TO A. H. C.

Te campo quaesivimus minore
Te in circo, te in omnibus libellis . . . . .

ΟΙ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΦΙΛΟΙ

O CHRISTIE, christened *Bibliòphilos*,
How runs the road to-day by Charing Cross?
Are shelves still ranged under your murky sky
Where poor men may discover books to buy?
Are there still men of so humane a mind
As to keep shops from floor to ceiling lined
With books—old books—in vellum, paper, cloth,
Drilled by the worm or ravaged by the moth,
Where one may while the lettered hours away,
Unheeded, nor be ever dunned to pay?
Are there yet shelves within the common reach
Weighted with volumes priced at sixpence each?
Vellum 8vo's black with London's grime
By printers who were famous in their time:—
Dodsley's Miscellany: some prints from Cuyp:
An Aeschylus in boards and Caslon type:
Froeben's Euripides: a Plantin Persius:
"On the Sublime" by Burke: Elzevir's Mersius:
A Roger's Italy with Turner's plates:
A paper copy of the rhymes of Yeats:—
Three score of books on shelves outside the shop
Before which any folk who pass may stop. . . .
And is there still that lively paradox,
The treasure-chamber of the penny-box?
What gem is there one may not one day choose
Out of that dusty rubbish for two sous?

To tempt caprice of fate men travel far:
They strive to sound the seas or reach a star:
They strange adventure seek by sea and land;
In Western woods or on the Orient sand.
But throughout all the alley-ways of Chance,
Or near or far, I know of no Romance:
No wealth of wonder: no ecstatic glee,
Such as the penny-box can give to me.
There once I found (dear friend, do you remember?)
One dark and foggy day in mid-November,
Inside just such a box near Soho Square,
With Chambers' Journal and the "Grave" of Blair,
Kirke White's Remains and paper-backs by Gyp,
"England's Elizabeth"—I thought it cheap;
That fairy eulogy of throne and state,
Printed in London, 1558;
A tome compact of eloquence and wit,
Just for one common, copper penny-bit!
Reuter I know has gone, but rests there still
The quiet, sober-tinted shop of Hill?
Thorpe's in St. Martin's Lane? And does Dobell
Still have as many pleasant books to sell?
And does Barberi still in his small room,
Covered with dust and hidden in the gloom,
Hoard precious *incunabula* away
From the unkind and garish light of day?
There, you and I, how many hours we've spent
Lit by the guttering candle that he lent;

And there, behind a pile of prints, I found
That Kallierges Pindar, vellum-bound ;
Then there was that old Jew in the Arcade :
How many journeys you and I have made
Around his ladened shelves : and there I bought
My Dallas—analyst of critick thought :
The Ammianus, and an early Donne
And Michael Drayton's Polyolbion.
Once, on a rainy day (you were not there)
I lost myself behind Red Lion Square,
Where, in a grimy shop, I found a woman,
A tousled, unwashed creature, scarcely human,
Who rummaged in the window midst the litter
Of faked brass-ware and common lustre glitter,
To reach some tattered volumes, brown with stain,
I had caught sight of through the window-pane.
She wrapped the book up in " The Evening News " :
I paid threepence for it : I shall not lose
In buying at that price (unbacked, 'tis true)
A Pico (Procter 10052).
I never found that wonder-shop again, ;
Long hours I searched for it and searched in vain ;
And once, when you and I were walking up
Shaftesbury Avenue, we chanced to stop
Before a small and unpretending place
Some dozen doors from Rimell's ; such a case
Of books as stood in view beside the door
Never in book-shops had we seen before . . .

Vellum 8vo's by the Flemish men;
Plantin and Elzevir and Etienne:
Giunta and Jenson and their nearest cousins
And Aldine duodecimos by dozens:
A περὶ Ὕψους done by Stephanus
The Ἀνέκδοτα of Procopius,
Vignola's Opera and Hogarth's "Rake,"
The poems of Hayley with the plates by Blake. . . .
But thus I might for ever catalogue,
So rare those volumes gleamed through London fog,
All ticketed in shillings; five, six, seven—
We asked each other—was this earth or heaven?
Which we would take we two together planned,
But found, alas! we had no cash to hand,
Save just enough to pay our homeward fare,
And not a solitary sou to spare.
We noted well the shop, and on the morrow
Returned with all the money we could borrow;
But though a dozen times we past the place
Where the shop had been, we found nor sign nor trace
Of any bookshop there—t'was very odd;
Yet I've a theory that it is God
Who keeps that shop, that there poor scholars may
Find a brief gleam illumine their dull day,
And stir their hearts, deadened by damned routine
In seeing what no scholars yet have seen:
That just for once beneath their starless sky
Some shadow of their dreams might fructify.

I like to think of this—that God is kind
To folk of empty purse and eager mind.
(And yet I find the joke a little grim ;
Surely His humour ran away with Him,
Thus to present His books upon the shelf
For us to purchase when we had no pelf,
And afterward, spirit them all away !)
How pleasant is the sober, sombre grey,
Yet bravely, gallant road from Charing Cross.
And now, to-day, your gain becomes my loss :
No more, before the shelves, do I decoy
Your errant gaze on to some worthless toy,
Leaving me free to search the shelf's dark end.
But now, alone, in our old haunts, dear friend,
You have no more my eager search to foil,
Lest I should win on you and seize the spoil.
Now all the books are yours ; and yet I know
You will not always feel the lover's glow
In seeing some rare prize, and I not there,
Your lack to envy and your joy to share.
So dreamful here, I like to think it true,
That, sometimes, when some jewel gleams for you,
You do not, all-forgetful, seize the prize,
But passing by with humble, lowered eyes,
Say : " Had he been here too perhaps his eye
Would first have seen this book in passing by,
Therefore in friendship's courtesy I ought
This once to leave the book I love unbought ! "
I like to think that sometimes this is so.

And here in this satiric puppet show,
The dupe of cruel gods and sport of chance,
Weary in these beleaguered fields of France,
I dream of days that were and days to be
Happy to think you still have thought of me.
For here there are no books : no magic street
Where by whose dusty bookshelves scholars meet :
No manuscripts for patient minds to con :
No codices to guard our Helicon.
We cannot here, when evening shadows fall,
Wrapped in our cloaks defy the winter's squall,
And underneath the gas-lamp's flickering glare,
Seek the unknown, the curious and the rare ;
Within some aged portals to discover
An old Greek text inside a tattered cover,
With reverence to take it (not too far)
To a red-curtained, unpretending bar :
Behind the oak-partition there to dine,
Not off an *om'lette fine* and Bordeaux wine,
But rather as Kit Marlowe might have done—
Or Keats, intent upon Hyperion—
And with a cheddar cheese and pint of stout
Through a long evening thrash the close text out.

Christie, for me the ways of war are hard—
An artist and a scholar and a bard ;

My triple function here makes for no ends,
And save for the stern loyalty of friends—
A few firm friends who pass my weakness by
For the faint flame I cherish—surely I
Had long since passed into the place of dreams.
For here the past grows dim and no hope gleams
To light our way for us in days to be.
So well-beloved and very sweet to me
Are they who here consider my distress.
Ugarte qualifies my loneliness
With whisperings of the South, until again
I see the sun-hot rock : the dusty plain :
The cypress black against the saffron sky :
The road-side shrine : the oxen lumbering by ;
Until I hear the mule-bells in the glen
And smell the myrtle and the cyclamen.
When melancholy finds me unawares
And clouds my vision, Borden-Turner bears
With my ill-humour ; —patient, wise and kind—
Until the darkness lightens in my mind ;
And gives me strength to fight for my reprieve,
To imagine and to labour and believe.
Built round with books, in vellum and in calf,
Here, too, De Ricci sometimes makes me laugh :
His cynic wit : his quips on man and book ;
(Mixed with citations on the Heptateuch)
And happy evenings spent in turning over
The well-loved books of that well-loved book-lover.

Ah! Christie, when these woeful wars will cease,
(If cease they ever will) and patient Peace
Permits poor scholars to depart once more
Into the parts they love, out of the roar
And hurry of this world which is not theirs;
Come down with me where San Vitale bears
Her glory to the blue Italian skies;
And you and I with understanding eyes
Shall loiter in her aisles and sculptured crypts
Or search the town for painted manuscripts.
But this is all a dream; and now my books
Are lonely in their shelves, and no one looks
To see what company are gathered there.
Old friend, I pray you, let it be your care
To go into my library and pay
That duty that I owe to friends who stay
So patient in their shelves for my return.
Take them and study them; I know they yearn
For human friendship in the silent hours;
Take them and talk to them—true friend of ours—
And tell them that when this calamity
Has passed away, if happily I see
My own place once again; no force shall tear
Me from their fellowship; and that I swear,
By all the gods, never again to brook
Aught that shall part the scholar from his book.

SONNETS OUT OF SEQUENCE

SAN APOLLINARE IN CLASSE

I DO not know what ghosts await me here
Among your columns of black porphyry ;
But there they stand : and whosoe'er they be,
Or if from them I've anything to fear,
Encroaches not on this my hemisphere.
That these immortals should have speech with me
Confers too much on my mortality,
And yet they seem to whisper in my ear.

Here lies the dust of him who talked with Paul.
Surely the stairway to the crypt is gold
Which leads one to the sepulchre of such ;
Yet mildew stains the painting on the wall :
The cab I came here in was foul and old ;
And the unwashed who drove me charged too much.

BOLOGNA

A CITY built in arches! How the mind
Seizes the picture! Arch by arch arrayed,
Street upon street in endless colonnade:
Sun-gilded squares with countless columns lined;
Where in the noon of summer one may find
A cool and quiet place and gracious shade:
Where one may walk bareheaded, unafraid,
And meet on stillest eves a truant wind.

There, where Giovanni cast his thoughts in bronze
That we might yet believe that which we know,
Though wrought for us so many years ago.
There, with the dawn, we made our orisons,
And wondered if, when this our age should pass,
Our steel and concrete would outlive his brass.

TOULOUSE

I LOVE your sunny town built all of brick
Better than I can say ; and there I spent
Long laughing summer days in merriment,
Whilst callous-hearted Time's arithmetic
Sought not to stay my freedom or to trick
Me from the lazy ways wherein I went ;
A scholar, wandering without intent ;
Idle, inopportune, impolitic.

There, late at night, you might have found me yet
Before a little round-topped table set,
Drinking the golden *Muscat* in short sips.
Or any afternoon I might be seen
Beneath a large umbrella of bright green ;
A penny-whistle plaintive to my lips.

GIOTTO'S TOWER

THERE is a tower of coloured marble made
Aglow against the sapphire Tuscan sky ;
And none can cross the square and pass it by
Without an upward glance in homage paid.
Surely the poet might have been afraid.
To build so beautiful a things so high ;
Yet still the rose and purple stones defy
Sun-heat and storm ; and through the years have stayed

A testimony to the faith in man :
A miracle for all the world to scan ;
By Brunelleschi's dome of gold and green
A tower of alabaster when at night
The crescent swings above it, and a light
Of rose and silver in the sunset sheen.

ANGANI

GRAVELY I walked within your gleaming square
And dreamed that had I such a stage as this,
No force should hinder my anabasis
In climbing to that starry bastion where
The Muses with the bay-wreath wait me, there
To calm my troubled spirit with their kiss,
Till I could nothing mar and nothing miss
And all my work was true and yet most fair.

Till all the peoples of the earth still stayed
To look upon the drama that I made;
And dreamful still I watched the shadows creep,
A purple pattern on the gilded dust. . . .
I went into the inn and ate a crust
Of bread and drank some wine and fell asleep.

THE NEW RENAISSANCE

BEYOND the shadow of the hills there gleams
The dawn; and though the arch of heaven be dark,
Yet in the heart the undiminished spark
Is kindled still with the frail stuff of dreams:
And though the sun be veiled, to me it seems
The spirit of this age lies slain and stark;
Already, through the din, I hear the lark,
And captive still, wander by haunted streams.

When all the common things of life have grown
As luminous as shines the onyx stone
In the white moonlight: then, through years of peace,
Wisdom shall lodge with us; and, as in Greece,
Once more the minds of men shall turn from strife
To be apprenticed in the Art of Life.

AN AFTERWORD

DEAR book, depart! You have through one long year
Quickened the advent of the slow day's end:
Helped to dispel despair: to banish fear;
And been more than a friend.

You found no march too wearisome to mask
Its pain with imagined pleasure for a while:
You found no way too rude—you knew no task
Too arduous to beguile.

Once, in the age of youth, with roses wreathed,
I started in the long, lean road of war:
A magic in the very air I breathed
And in my heart a star.

That star has long since paled; and had I not
Found your delight so strong, your love so sure
I had not so long laboured in this plot
With courage to endure.

Here, ever in a crowd I walk alone,
Slave to Imagination's scurvy tricks,
Borne with a gift of temper far too prone,
To kick against the pricks.

Go, little book! that friends I love may learn
That they throughout these wars are still held dear;
Of how I dream of days beyond return
In this my exile here.

And say—if any should deplore my plight—
That it is hard for the poet to believe
That what has given so much joy to write
In reading should but grieve.

Now the last words are written, and no more
Shall you enthrall my vision in the Art:
Oh, never have I said "Farewell" before
With quite so sad a heart!

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